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SUBJECT: ADANA AKP CHAIRMAN ENGAGES CONSTRUCTIVELY ON SENSITIVE ISSUES

1. (SBU) Summary: Adana AKP Chairman Abdullah Dogru constructively engaged us on a number of sensitive issues in Turkey-US relations. He was confident that the AKP would remain in power in the upcoming elections and would find a lasting solution to the Kurdish issue within the next five years. Dogru called for dialogue with Iran to avoid further conflict between nations, and greater understanding on religious issues to avoid conflict between the West and Islam, as demonstrated in the recent anti-Islam cartoon issue as well as recent cases of attacks against Christians in Turkey. End summary.

2. (SBU) Adana AKP Chairman Abdullah Dogru paid a courtesy call on the Consulate on February 6. In wide-ranging discussions Dogru talked about US-Iran relations, recent cases of intolerance against local Christians, anti-Muslim cartoons in Denmark and the AKP's chances in upcoming elections. On the cartoon issue, Dogru emphasized the importance of mutual respect of each others' beliefs and urged the US to continue to stay engaged on the issue. On Iran, Dogru also emphasized the importance of dialogue and again urged the US to stay engaged with our allies and the Iranians to avoid further conflict in the region.

3. (SBU) On the issue of attacks against Christians in Adana and Trabzon, he said that people in the SE still needed to be educated about freedoms, including freedom of religion. Dogru opined that instances of recent violence against Christians could be seen as efforts against Turkey's EU bid.

4. (SBU) Dogru was clearly interested in our views on the AKP, and asked for our thoughts on how we thought the party was doing. He said that the party currently enjoyed a 45% popularity rating and that it was still developing after only about 4 years in power. He said the party's goal was to stay in power for two more terms-he was confident that the AKP would stay in power after the presidential election. On the Kurdish issue, he asserted that following the Turkish presidential election, the AKP would find a solution and that the PM embraced all groups in Turkey, including the Kurds, whom the PM clearly wanted to help. Dogru promised that democracy would expand under the AKP's leadership, and predicted that in the next 3 to 5 years the AK Party would find a lasting solution to the Kurdish issue.

5. (SBU) In discussing the controversy arising from the anti-Muslim cartoons in Denmark, Dogru applauded the US remarks announced in a US Embassy press release when the Principal Officer shared them with him. He said AK rank-and-file were deeply offended by the cartoons. He also said that he was puzzled why so many Turks were discontent with the US when it shared a cultural identity with strong religious roots and respected Islam while, on the other hand, they positively reacted to a secular Europe without a religious identity any more. Dogru agreed that hate speech should be denounced, but in a non-violent fashion. He said he did not expect to see attacks on foreign missions in Turkey such as in neighboring Syria or Lebanon.

Comment

6. (SBU) Dogru sought the meeting with us. He engaged constructively on a number of difficult issues in an area of Turkey where such issues are highly sensitive among the populace. We hope that by engaging him on these topics he can have a calming influence on Muslims in the Cukurova area.

REID